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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SPEAKER ATTIYAH DISCUSSES VISIT WITH SISTANI, THE SADRISTS, LEGISLATION, AND OTHER ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. Deputy CoR Speaker Sheikh Khalid Attiyah told the Ambassador, S/I Satterfield, and Special Assistant to the President Brett McGurk, that he met with Grand Ayatollah Sistani on Wednesday (April 17) in Najaf. While Sistani believes the security situation has improved in the South, he is concerned about the Sahawa movement, the situation in Sadr City, the oil law and the peshmerga, as well as reconstruction of the Samara shrine; he plans to discuss these issues with PM Maliki. Attiyah spoke strongly about the need to dissolve militias and rid their influence from provincial elections. Attiyah expressed concerns about the elections law received from the Council of Ministers (CoM) and said he will meet with the Prime Minister to propose amendments soon. He highlighted DPM Saleh's \$5 billion reconstruction plan as a positive effort to deliver services to the Iraqi people. He was optimistic about Tawafuq's potential return to the GOI. End Summary.

MEETING WITH SISTANI

¶2. (S/NF) Sheikh Attiyah told the Ambassador, S/I Satterfield, and McGurk that he met with Sistani in Najaf on Wednesday, April 17, and while Sistani believes the situation in the South has improved, he expressed several concerns. First, Sistani fears the 90,000 Sahawa members reportedly in the Iraqi Army (sic) will turn into a militia group and cause an "imbalance." Secondly, he is concerned about the deteriorating situation in Sadr City. He also supports dissolving the militias and keeping them away from provincial elections. Sistani also voiced concerns about the Kurdish region and specifically the oil law and peshmerga. Sistani believes all the people own the oil resources and that the peshmerga are a militia group. Sistani is also concerned about the slow rehabilitation of the Samara shrine. These are all issues, Attiyah said, that Sistani would like to discuss with PM Maliki in the near future.

SADRISTS, MILITIAS, IRAN

¶3. (S/NF) The Ambassador raised with Attiyah the PM's recent announcements regarding his campaign against militias and asked about economic and political efforts underway with the Sadrists. In response, Attiyah said the Iraqi people are frustrated with the Sadrists movement and its militia. "People are afraid of them," he emphasized, again stressing that militias need to be dissolved. He added some CoR members have received threats from the Sadrists. Attiyah also mentioned from his meeting in Najaf that Sistani thinks Moqtada al-Sadr (MoS) is "imbalanced." At the same time, Attiyah said Sistani is reluctant to issue religious opinions on MoS and the militias. He agreed that Iran is supporting the militia groups, including Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM).

LEGISLATION

¶4. (C/NF) Sheikh Attiyah received a copy of the elections law from the Council of Ministers (CoM) this week. Attiyah said he has some concerns with the law and had some proposed amendments. "I will talk to the Prime Minister about the issue of revisiting the law," he added without providing detail regarding his objections. He said the current draft calls for an open list model. The United Nations will provide the CoR with ideas of how the ballots should be put together, he noted. "Everyone should take part in the elections and this democratic system," he said, while he noted that militias can have no role and this might impact the Sadrists' participation. Regarding the oil law, Attiyah agreed it is a critical piece of legislation and said he is engaging Oil Minister Shahristani on this issue.

¶5. (C/NF) Attiyah told the Ambassador that DPM Saleh has put aside a \$5 billion supplemental budget that will focus on delivering services to the people. "We must cut through the red tape on this issue," stressed Attiyah. He noted that both DPM Saleh and the Mayor of Baghdad would be at the CoR on Tuesday (April 22) to discuss these projects in more detail. "This will give people hope," he said. The Ambassador encouraged the CoR to invite other members of the GOI to come provide testimony and explain the problems in each of their ministries. Attiyah agreed this is a good idea and that it will make a good impression on the CoR.

NEGOTIATIONS OVER RETURN TO THE GOI

¶6. (S/NF) Attiyah stressed the Tawafuq front return is very

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important to the national reconciliation effort. VP Tariq al-Hashimi agreed to Tawafuq's return in principle, he said, in a meeting with the Prime Minister. He is working out the details of the return, including the positions of ministers in the cabinet, he added. When asked by the Ambassador about the status of the PM's engagement with the Sadrists, Attiyah said the Sadrists have suffered a severe setback in power.

CROCKER